

You feel kind of nervous. Not shaking on the outside. Maybe on the inside. But not on the outside of the inside. You can't feel your physical guts. But there's nervousness in you.

You read somewhere that when people focus on things consciously, the influence of the thing they take in consciously works its way invisibly into their behaviors and attitudes and perceptions, subtly, subconsciously. Oh, that word "subconscious".

You aren't really having a bad day, or a good day. Just a day. But the nervousness is in you.

You get through all the editing you have to do for the day. It's easy and it's hard. Pretty soon you're getting hungry and you get up and make yourself some food. A quesadilla. With salsa on it. There's this one brand of salsa that comes in a glass jar you can get at the supermarket. It actually comes from Mexico, and that's the salsa you put on your quesadilla.

You decide to go to the cafe after that. What's life without a rut? Ruts aren't all bad.

You walk to...

MITZI's CAFE

A homely place to you now. As you open the glass door, you can smell baked goods and coffee. Mostly coffee, but also

baked goods. You wonder if you will have to eat something before you leave this place. Your nervousness might want you to.

After you get your tea, you sit down at a table and pass some time looking out the window.

Julia enters and comes over to your table.

JULIA: Beth, I've been feeling some strange energies today.

YOU: Yeah, I've felt this faint... nervous feeling.

JULIA: Earlier today I had the jitters.

YOU: Do you think something is going to happen?

JULIA: I don't know, maybe. Yeah, *something* is going to happen.

YOU: Like an earthquake?

JULIA: I don't know.

YOU: But we should stay alert.

JULIA: Yeah.

Brian enters and stands in line. Julia gets up to go order, standing behind him. You are all close enough to hear each other. Someone is ahead of Brian in line and is taking her time ordering.

JULIA: Brian, how are you today?

BRIAN: I've been thinking about all kinds of weird things today.

JULIA: What kind of weird?

BRIAN: Well, there's my normal weird things, and then there's what I've been thinking about today.

JULIA: Beth and I have been feeling weird, too.

BRIAN: Interesting. I wonder if something's going to happen.

JULIA: Hopefully nothing bad.

BRIAN: Oh, now it's my turn.

Brian orders some herbal tea and a scone. Then Julia gets a coffee and a croissant. They make their way to your table.

JULIA: Brian had the right idea, ordering food.

YOU: When big things are afoot, it's good to have a full stomach.

BRIAN: Not too full.

JULIA: Don't worry, Mitzi's' baked goods will never make you too full.

The barista tonight, Alicia, hears but does not care.

YOU: So what do we do while we wait for something big to happen?

JULIA: I don't know. Maybe we can do what we

normally do.

BRIAN: Talk.

JULIA: Be part of the Universe.

YOU: Anything new happen?

BRIAN: Before tonight, I was feeling pretty good, because I got somewhere good in my book project.

YOU: Anything you can talk about?

BRIAN: No, you'll just have to see when I'm finished.

YOU: Okay, that's fine.

JULIA: What's your book about? I forget if you told me.

BRIAN: Were you paying attention?

JULIA: Yes.

BRIAN: Are you paying attention now?

JULIA: Yes.

BRIAN: It's about listening to God. It's about how everything we experience is God's speech to us. Basically what I've already been talking to you guys about, on and off.

JULIA: But your book is going to be interesting?

BRIAN: Yes, I'm going to make it really interesting, in the way that I write it.

JULIA: When will it be done?

BRIAN: I don't know.

JULIA: Have you started it yet?

BRIAN: I've done a lot of thinking for it.

JULIA: So you've thought about starting it.

BRIAN: I've thought about starting it.

JULIA: Are you going to finish it?

BRIAN: Yes, I'm going to finish it.

JULIA: I believe you. I can see destiny in you.

BRIAN: What's that?

JULIA: It's like gravity in the Universe. The Universe is like a giant field or matrix of plot points, and stories flow from one place to another according to destiny, which is like gravity.

BRIAN: Is that all the Universe is?

JULIA: No, the Universe is everything put together. But it's just a flow of forces, the flow of narrative forces.

BRIAN: Are we stories? Or plot points?

JULIA: No, we're characters.

BRIAN: So the Universe is all the characters and plot points held together by destiny?

JULIA: Well, we're held together by something.

But we travel by the power of destiny.

BRIAN: Why would my destiny be to write a book about God?

JULIA: People believe in God, and you're going to help them believe something different about him.

BRIAN: But it wouldn't be true.

JULIA: The Universe doesn't care. It just makes things happen.

BRIAN: Can you trust the Universe?

JULIA: The Universe shows you the way to go. It says "Here's the highway", and if you don't want to trip, go on the highway because it's paved.

BRIAN: Do you know where the highway goes?

JULIA: It goes where it goes. If you don't like it, get used to it. That's what you can do, is get used to it. That's what makes you a good person.

BRIAN: Where did the characters come from?

JULIA: I don't know.

BRIAN: If the Universe is all about plot points, that makes sense. I could see there being a bunch of NPCs, doing what the Universe wanted them to do.

YOU: "NPCs"?

BRIAN: "Non-Player Characters", like in a video game, some characters are played by the player or players, and some aren't.

YOU: Oh, like in Final Fantasy. The ones who have two lines of dialogue and walk back and forth.

BRIAN: Exactly. But NPCs could in theory be really sophisticated. They just don't have any consciousness, unlike player characters.

YOU: Which have my consciousness, if I'm playing them.

BRIAN: Exactly.

JULIA: Brian, pick up where you left off. You were saying something.

BRIAN: I was saying something about the Universe making sense if everyone was an NPC. But something about my own experience makes me feel like I'm alien to the Universe.

JULIA: Because you have free will?

BRIAN: Yes, that's one thing. But even if I didn't have free will... I care. *I care.*

YOU: You care on a personal level.

BRIAN: As me, Brian. I care as someone with my particular past and present, and presumably, with the future I'll have. I care as a full person. And that makes me alien to everything, if the Universe is all about narrative gravity.

JULIA: Are you an alien to everything?

BRIAN: I have been, in the past. But as I connect more with God, I see that all the events outside of me are spoken to me by God. God is what connects me to what's outside me in a deeply

personal way.

JULIA: Are you telling us what's going to be in your book now?

BRIAN: You're right. That's all I'm going to say for now.

YOU: Brian, what if whatever it is we're nervous about kills us and we never got the chance to hear what you had to say?

You all laugh at your joke.

Julia gets a text.

JULIA: My uncle is in town.

BRIAN: Your uncle?

JULIA: Yeah... he wants to know if I want to come over and see him and my aunt.

YOU: Does he come into town often?

JULIA: No.

YOU: Well, you should go see him. Carefully.

BRIAN: The roads are dangerous on jittery nights.

JULIA: Oh wait, he says... my aunt is sick and just wants to rest... But she doesn't need him...

BRIAN: Do you think he would want to meet us?

JULIA: Hm... actually... I never thought about it but I bet you guys would like each other.

YOU: This is our chance, then.

JULIA: "Hey, if your interested come to mitzis cafe on washington. You can meet some friends of mine."

You wait and sip.

JULIA: Okay, he says, "Okay I'm on my way Julia good to see you again"

YOU: What's your uncle like?

JULIA: First of all, his name is Don. He's in his 60s. He's an uncle by marriage. He married my aunt, and they had two kids, my cousins. I used to hang out with my cousins a lot when I was a kid. All of this was before my curse started.

BRIAN: When was that, the curse, that is?

JULIA: When I stopped being a kid, when I was 17. It was a big surprise when it first happened but it only happened once. I thought I was just imagining things once I got back to normal. But then after a while I realized it was a real thing.

YOU: Did you tell your family about it?

JULIA: I kept it to myself until I was sure it was a real thing and then I told them. At first just my parents, but now everybody knows.

YOU: What else to know about your Uncle Don?

JULIA: He's the only one in the family who's a Christian. My grandparents took their kids to church on Christmas and Easter but that was it. A lot of us have gotten into spiritual things. But

Uncle Don wasn't part of the family. He was an atheist when he married my aunt and then after a few years went through a conversion experience.

YOU: How do you feel about that?

JULIA: It was before I was born so I don't have any memories of how that went. But he's my favorite uncle.

YOU: Do you think his Christianity has anything to do with what kind of person he is?

JULIA: Maybe. I heard a quote one time which is that religions make people more of who they are. They're like amplifiers.

BRIAN: Maybe because religions help people have faith in themselves, disguised as faith in God?

JULIA: Yeah.

BRIAN: Do you know anything about what he was like before his conversion?

JULIA: Yeah, see here's the thing, Brian, he was into philosophy. So I know you two will have a lot to talk about.

BRIAN: Did he study it in school?

JULIA: I don't know. I know he was into it in college.

YOU: What do you like about him?

JULIA: Are you trying to figure him out from a distance?

YOU: You're right, I was trying to form expectations.

BRIAN: Expectations are the worst.

YOU: I know Brian, I'm trying to quit.

BRIAN: They just lead to disappointment.

YOU: Disappointment is okay if that's what you're going for.

BRIAN: But disappointment, by definition, is something that you're not going for.

YOU: You're right. Well, what else can we talk about while we wait for him?

BRIAN: Maybe we can go on another car trip in the city sometime.

JULIA: I can drive, if my legs are in good shape.

YOU: Where should we go?

BRIAN: You know the Fortress?

YOU: Is that that one gated community?

BRIAN: It's the original gated community, at least in the Wonderland.

YOU: It's got the statues?

BRIAN: Yeah, statues on the rooftops.

JULIA: Let's just talk about going in great detail but not actually go there. Brian, have you been there?

BRIAN: Yeah, a few years ago.

JULIA: Tell us what we will see.

BRIAN: The Fortress is located in what was once an intermittent stream bed cutting between the fifth and sixth of the Hell Hills. It was established in the 1920s by a group of very rich men who came to both establish business concerns in Hoheres Wesen and also relax in the ample sunshine of Southern California. They decided that they wanted to keep the common people out, but in a beautiful way, so they built great iron gates at each end of the canyon. There was one road through it, named Riverview Boulevard. By day, they let people through who looked like the kind of people they liked. By night, they shut the gates and only let people go in and out if they lived there.

JULIA: As we approach, what will the iron gates look like?

BRIAN: Nowadays, the main part of the gate, the part that could block traffic, has been removed, but the rest remains. It's ornate and very strong, with patterns of ivy crawling up it, but in a way that does not make it easy to climb. At the top, there are sharp points. Written in large letters, visible to us as we approach on Riverview Boulevard, is the motto of the community, "Attend To Your Own Business", a message embodying all that was most valued to the founders of the Fortress.

JULIA: Is "the Fortress" really the name of the neighborhood?

BRIAN: Not officially. The founders called it

"Riverview Heights".

JULIA: Describe the heights.

BRIAN: Large houses and mansions are built set on the side of the canyon and the hills, cul-de-sacs snaking up to them and sometimes switching back.

JULIA: Describe the mansions.

BRIAN: They are mansions but they have cool statues on the top.

JULIA: Describe the statues.

BRIAN: The statues are made of bronze and depict an epic battle. It is as though they are fighting rooftop to rooftop, each statue on the rooftop of a mansion. Foot soldiers aim their arrows at each other. A man is wounded. Gods tower, goddesses strike dead, everyone is twisted, in motion. It is a masterpiece. We are impressed.

JULIA: Where do I park?

BRIAN: There is no place to park. All the parking is tightly regulated for residents' use only. You just have to drive around all the time.

JULIA: Wow, I'm imagining myself wishing we had only gone on a journey there in our imaginations.

BRIAN: There is some parking down in front of the touristy business district, but only while we shop.

JULIA: Describe the shops.

BRIAN: They are all touristy and all upscale. An

upscale ice cream shop, an upscale clothing boutique, an upscale coffeeshop, an upscale jewelry store, an upscale bistro, an upscale restaurant.

JULIA: An upscale dry cleaner?

BRIAN: No, residents of Riverview Heights have to drive through the gates to do their dry cleaning. There just isn't room on Riverview Boulevard, which only stretches a mile from gate to gate.

JULIA: But Riverview Boulevard is a major street. It goes all the way down to the ocean and nearly goes up into the mountains, except that it's at the wrong angle.

BRIAN: But the portion within the gates is only a mile.

JULIA: I see. So all those places in the H.W. where there is no river to be seen, but the boulevard is Riverview Boulevard, that all connects to the group of very wealthy men who founded Riverview Heights in the 1920s?

BRIAN: Yes.

JULIA: Okay, so let's park and get some ice cream.

BRIAN: Okay. We each order ice cream.

JULIA: Do they have pistachio ice cream?

BRIAN: Definitely.

JULIA: Okay, I'm ordering that.

YOU: I'll get a scoop of chocolate and a scoop of

vanilla.

BRIAN: What kind of chocolate?

YOU: What kinds do they have?

BRIAN: Dark chocolate, fudge, and chocolate milk.

YOU: Oh wow, chocolate milk?

BRIAN: It's a light chocolate.

YOU: Okay, well since I'm getting vanilla, I'll have dark chocolate.

BRIAN: What kind of vanilla?

YOU: What kind of vanilla?

BRIAN: Just kidding, there is only one kind of vanilla, very high quality vanilla with little bits of vanilla bean in it.

YOU: What will you be having?

BRIAN: Nothing.

YOU: Nothing?

JULIA: You came all the way out to Riverview Heights and you're not going to buy something?

BRIAN: Well... okay.... I'll get some seltzer water.

JULIA: So now what?

BRIAN: We sit out on the deck and watch the traffic go by as we enjoy our consumables. Then we leave.

JULIA: Where do we go next? We've barely done anything for all the driving I've done.

BRIAN: Okay, so we could go check out Los Ciudadanos.

JULIA: What's that?

BRIAN: Back in the 1920s, while Riverview Heights was being established, between another two of the Hell Hills, the second and third, a vibrant Mexican-American community was coming into being. But during the Great Depression, the land in between what had already been developed turned to slums, and the neighborhood never really got on its feet again until after World War II. In the 1960s, political sentiment built, and the residents of the neighborhood, named Los Ciudadanos, wanted to make a statement in counterpoint to Riverview Heights. So they built concrete pillars in people's backyards, and made concrete statues of their own battle scene, a mythical scene, symbolizing ongoing struggles, with eagle, snake, and other Meso-American symbolic animals.

JULIA: Okay, that sounds like an interesting place to go. Do they have taco shops?

BRIAN: Los Ciudadanos is a regular H.W. neighborhood and flows out seamlessly into the sprawl on either end of the canyon. It's nothing fancy, nothing nice, nothing blighted.

JULIA: So it has taco shops?

BRIAN: More than one.

JULIA: So then we get tacos. Describe the tacos.

Brian thinks and is about to say when in walks a man whom Julia recognizes as her uncle Don.

JULIA: Hey Uncle Don!

DON: Hey Julia! Good to see you!

He walks over to the table.

DON: These must be your friends!

BRIAN: We are. I'm Brian.

YOU: I'm Beth.

DON: Beth, what a lovely name! Brian is a good name too. It means "warrior", doesn't it?

BRIAN: A lot of names mean "warrior" if you go back far enough.

DON: Absolutely. The world is a place for war. Listen, I need to get something to drink. What do you recommend here?

YOU: Can you have caffeine?

DON: Probably shouldn't, not this late at night.

BRIAN: The herbal teas are all good.

DON: The herbal teas are good? Alright, maybe I'll have one of those.

He goes to order, and while he's at the front of the line gets to talking to Alicia.

JULIA: That's Uncle Don, always getting into

conversations.

After a while, Don returns with his drink.
It's iced.

DON: Alicia said I might try their switchel.

JULIA: That must be new.

DON: You may not have noticed it, it's written on a little sign next to the register.

YOU: What's in switchel?

DON: It's basically vinegar water, with a little salt, she said. It's a way people got hydrated back in the old days.

BRIAN: Interesting, I'll have to try that sometime.

Don takes a sip.

DON: You know, this is alright. Mine has two kinds of vinegar in it, malt and cider. I'll have to try and make this when I'm back at home.

Everyone sips.

DON: So. Julia. Tell me about your friends. Or your friends can speak for themselves if they want.

JULIA: Brian, you first.

BRIAN: I'm a writer. I'm interested in philosophy.

DON: Would you say that you are a philosopher?

BRIAN: I feel weird saying that.

DON: It's a line to cross, to go from being a student of philosophy to being a philosopher.

BRIAN: I see a lot of college professors calling themselves philosophers.

DON: Are you that kind of philosopher?

BRIAN: No, I'm not a college professor type of philosopher.

DON: So you're a gadfly, like Socrates? Or like Diogenes the Cynic?

BRIAN: No, not really. I'm a nice guy.

DON: Okay, good. A nice guy. Looking for beauty more than truth?

BRIAN: I consider that a trick question.

DON: You're right. Beauty and truth are always the same thing. But they aren't always good for you.

BRIAN: But they're worth dying for.

DON: No thing is worth dying for, and there's only one person worth dying for, who shall remain unmentioned.

BRIAN: Yeah.

DON: I can tell that you and I will have a lot to say to each other. But I want to see what Beth has to say about herself.

YOU: I'm an editor and a writer.

DON: What kind of things do you write about?

YOU: I mostly just write short stories to pass the time, get the energy out of me.

DON: You have a lot of energy?

YOU: I do.

DON: But you're a calm person.

YOU: Yes.

DON: Have you ever considered publishing your short stories?

YOU: When I was younger I did. I thought I was becoming an editor just to pay the bills for my writing career. But then at some point I got to where I would just write the stories but never have the whatever it took to look at them again or edit them. So they just sit on my hard drive.

DON: But you're not really disappointed with your life.

YOU: No, it is what it is.

DON: Maybe someday you'll show the stories to an editor.

YOU: Maybe.

DON: Maybe not. We'll see. You'll see. I might not know.

YOU: Well, if I remember, I can tell Julia to tell you.

DON: Yes, that would be very nice.

YOU: What kind of work do you do?

DON: I'm a businessman these days. When I was younger I tried being a pastor, but then I got convicted about all the time I was spending asking people for money, so I got into the vending machine business. I cut back a lot as a pastor, but we were able to send money to missions overseas. So that was a good thing. But then I got to where, like you with your writing, I was just a Christian in the moment, and I couldn't come back to it professionally, couldn't edit it or look at it.

YOU: That sounds like a natural faith.

DON: You know, you're right, it's a good faith for a vending machine guy. But for a pastor, you have to take on a heavier burden. Bigger temptations there. You ever read *The Lord of the Rings*?

YOU: Oh yeah.

DON: That guy Tom Bombadil is unaffected by the Ring, so he can't wear it, because it's just not for him. He'd lose it. That's how I am with the ministry, with Christianity.

YOU: So pastors have to face corruption and evil?

DON: Absolutely. They're fighting the status quo. If you're fighting Satan, you get pushback. He has us programmed so that we sin when we try hard to do things. That's what keeps the status quo together. We can try hard to do things that don't change the status quo, and not sin in an obvious way, but something's always waiting to get you when you try to change the way things are, like

magic.

YOU: I can see that. Something would, or else things would be different.

DON: Exactly. With your permission, I'll talk some more to Brian, is that alright? Oh, Julia, you don't mind if I focus on your friends?

JULIA: No, Uncle Don, this is fine. We'll have another chance to talk.

DON: Okay, glad to hear it. So Brian, I want to share a little bit about when I was younger.

BRIAN: Okay.

DON: When I was in college, I got into philosophy in a big way. Back then I was an atheist, and what I wanted was a way to explain how the world worked. I liked math and science when I was in high school, like the proofs in geometry class and learning about how atoms worked in chemistry class and all of that. All of that good stuff. But in the back of my mind I always wondered about how consciousness worked in with atoms. How could there be both matter and consciousness? You probably have some good ideas about that, but first hear my whole story.

BRIAN: Sure.

DON: Well, I found out that the place to go to to ask questions about matter and consciousness was the subject of metaphysics. I found out that there is so much more to metaphysics than just that question. I tried to learn what I could from the books I could find in the library. I read Plato and Aristotle all the way up to the existentialists. At

first I read about them. You ever read Copleston?

BRIAN: Yeah, I have some of his books.

DON: Well, I got into them and read a lot of the primary sources. But I wanted to know what was going on in philosophy in modern times, and it seemed to me, from what I could see, that people had given up on the search to really explain metaphysics. None of the older philosophers had ever figured it out and there was nothing any of the contemporary philosophers were saying that really said anything. So there were a lot of theories, but nobody really *knew* the answer to metaphysics. So from that I got into epistemology and ethics and all that stuff. Not just reading the history of philosophy but really grappling with it myself. I would have rather understood metaphysics and ontology, but the other stuff was more popular and it seemed to get results. But then I realized that ethics was just a form of pressure, like people pressuring each other, and that in epistemology, nobody could really figure out if anyone knew anything, same as how nobody knew anything about metaphysics. Nobody knew anything but everyone was really interested in philosophy, and they said really interesting things. It was so strange to me though... reality is all around us, here, there, right in front of your face, you can drink reality and talk, but when you think about it critically, you find you can't say anything and you can't know anything? Very strange. Ultimate reality is so accessible but so far away. But it's really just right here, is what I thought.

BRIAN: Yeah, that sounds like things I've thought.

DON: Wonderful. So I got into politics. Whatever fire in me wanted to get into philosophy, wanted

to get into politics. The political drive was somehow the same as the philosophical drive, I guess a craving for a connection with reality. So I got into leftist stuff, but as I got older I found myself talking a lot with my roommate, who was more of a liberal. So we talked about all the different ways leftism was better than liberalism, and liberalism was better than leftism. But we agreed that leftism and liberalism were both about human well-being. And I got into marches and he got into policy until we were both worn out. And back then we both had a streak of being kind of nihilistic. We were nihilists and we were into things that mattered at the same time. And gradually, over time, the leftism I was into and the liberalism he was into got to us. And we slowly became more and more against all the control and anxiety in politics. So we half-seriously and half-not started to believe in what we called "passivism".

BRIAN: That sounds interesting.

DON: We said that people were divided between egoism and humanism. Both of them are about well-being. But we remembered this quote, or thought we remembered it, from Nietzsche, that goes like this: "Only a sick society cares about well-being." So passivism is where you don't do anything to seek well-being. And we took that pretty far. It even affected my school performance and early career. I did things out of any reason -- fate, duty, social obligation, caprice -- but I tried not to do things to seek well-being.

BRIAN: So if you don't focus on well-being, there's chance and law to motivate you. You would like laws exactly when there was a gap between them and the way things would be done in an ideal

world or simulation.

DON: Exactly. So I got tired of fate, duty, social obligation, caprice, all that, and one day I asked myself once more "If you don't focus on well-being, what is there?" And the answer I felt inside me was "Keep your heart true." So I thought about it, and it made sense to me, so I went for it. So now I had married my wife, and I was trying to figure out how to keep my heart true. And I was also still trying to figure out metaphysics and epistemology. Somehow there has to be a way that reality holds together. But I never figured it out. I lost my drive and interest in philosophy at around the same time that my first kid was born, who is a few years older than Julia here. And I was working real hard in my head all the time, and then giving up. And I had a kind of breakdown, always trying to keep my heart true, true to whatever principles I had. That's how I interpreted all that. Like I was doing all the altruistic, humanistic, egoistic things I had to as part of life, but I was doing it to be true to my heart. I was getting into a kind of legalism that way. I ended up being really true to myself, but then I kind of fell apart, and then through all of that I started attending a church. And I felt the Holy Spirit, and it just shut off all my interest in philosophy. But it or I should say he was real. But then over the years I've been thinking. Maybe there is something to philosophy. I think my mind just got shut down so I could get through everything. So anyway I went to seminary and became a pastor, and did some good work until I became a vending machine salesman and maintainer. And I raised some kids with my wife and God, and here I am. That's my story.

BRIAN: Okay, thank you. I don't always get to hear stories from older people.

DON: From your parents?

BRIAN: They've both died.

DON: You're young, late 20s, early 30s?

BRIAN: Late 20s.

DON: So young.

BRIAN: They died in a car crash.

DON: That's hard. You're missing out, but you'll find your way.

BRIAN: Yeah, it was hard for a while, but then I just kept going. Every day you keep going and that becomes your reality.

DON: But you never forget?

BRIAN: No, I never forget.

DON: But it's not bitter.

BRIAN: No, it's not bitter.

DON: No regrets?

BRIAN: No.

DON: Okay. Any other relatives?

BRIAN: Not so close.

DON: Okay. No church?

BRIAN: I'm not a Christian.

DON: No? But you believe in God?

BRIAN: Yes.

DON: Okay. Ah... no church for you. Okay. Well, what do you think, Brian? What are you thinking after all that?

BRIAN: I think there's something good about passivism. It's good not to be too much into well-being.

DON: Yeah, I think so.

BRIAN: But it must be hard. And how can you avoid well-being? It's like you have to serve it. It has to be your idol or you die.

DON: After I became a Christian I struggled with this and I struggled with it a long, long time. Several times I heard the answer right under my nose but it wasn't the right time for my eyes to be opened. Several times people would read the verse about "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's". You know what I'm talking about?

BRIAN: Yeah, I read the Bible.

DON: Excellent. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's"? Then render to health what is health's. Render to well-being what is well-being's. But don't give those wily idols what is God's. Your heart is for God. And there will be times where you have to choose, well-being, or God, to really have shown to yourself where your heart lies. But normally you pay your taxes. And you can get through life that way, but not get dragged down into life by life.

JULIA: Brian, this is like that hierarchy you were talking about.

DON: A hierarchy? Like Maslow's Hierarchy?

JULIA: Brian has his own hierarchy. Tell him about your hierarchy, Brian.

BRIAN: Okay... it's a variation on Maslow's Hierarchy. People betray you at the lower levels so you don't even let them in to the higher levels. Only people who are trustworthy in all the lower levels can betray you in the highest level, which I guess is self-actualization. But I don't know, I don't really like that as the highest.

DON: What I would do with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is add to it. It's pretty good in itself. But at the very bottom, you need God. And you always get God, so you don't realize you need God. God is always, always, always sustaining the world. And then at the very top of the pyramid, above everything, you need God, just God, nothing else.

JULIA: Because God loves you?

DON: God acts in the pyramid. He gives food and love. But above the very top of the pyramid, is just God for his own sake. And you don't always get God, but you keep looking and you find God. You can know that you need God, just God, but a lot of times the other needs get in the way. So maybe you have to satisfy all of your needs to figure out you need God. But some people have a direct path to that need. They are known as the "blessed".

BRIAN: Don't some people get all their needs and not feel the need for God?

DON: Maybe, yes, unfortunately. I don't know if I've met anyone like that but I bet I have.

JULIA: If they're perfectly happy with their lives, wouldn't God be happy that they're happy?

DON: I don't know the answer to that, but I know that when we're happy, it doesn't always work together with all the other happinesses.

BRIAN: I think I might know that answer.

DON: Don't tell me yet, I'm not ready to know. You'll tell me with something you're not sure of and I won't be ready to hear it.

BRIAN: Okay, I'll put it in my book.

DON: Send me a copy when you're done.

BRIAN: Will you have time to read it?

DON: I don't know, but sacrifice anyway.

BRIAN: Okay, that's not too much of a sacrifice.

DON: A few dollars and a lot of hours.

BRIAN: I have to put in the time anyway.

DON: Okay, well, look, my drink is long gone. You all have eaten your pastries and finished your drinks. Is there anything you want to hear?

YOU: Any embarrassing stories about Julia?

And Uncle Don obliges. Julia is embarrassed but enjoys the attention.

DON: Okay, well that's about all. I need to get back with my wife. Hello from her, Julia.

JULIA: I give you my hello to transmit to her. Hope she gets better.

DON: I think she will, this time. Okay, better get this old body on its feet...

He stands up, says good-bye, and walks out the door.

YOU: How are your jitters, Julia?

JULIA: I feel better, but they're not all gone. How is your nervousness?

YOU: Still there.

BRIAN: My mind is still processing, don't know if the weird thoughts have come back.

YOU: Okay, well, what would your uncle have said about all that?

JULIA: He would say, "pay attention".

YOU: I guess that makes sense.

BRIAN: I'm tired.

YOU: Yeah, me too.

JULIA: Tired and wired.

YOU: We're probably not good for each other right now.

BRIAN: We should part for our own good.

JULIA: Okay, then.

She stands. The rest of you follow suit,
and go your separate ways, into the
night.

[closing theme]

WAITING FOR MARGOT
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COMMENTS

1. I am not 100% sure, but I think the person who said religions were like amplifiers is Katy Brand. If it was her, I heard her say it on a podcast where she was paired with a Christian comedian to discuss Christianity (I'm pretty sure that podcast would have been Unbelievable?).

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